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Deception Confirmed

Evidence from the vast 40-volume review by a Pentagon team of how the United States got into the Vietnam war makes President Johnson's escalation in 1965 after his emphasis on moderation in the 1964 presidential campaign look more contradictory than ever.

The 40 volumes were prepared in 1967-68 from Pentagon secret files by 30 or 40 men, on orders from Robert S. McNamara, then secretary of defense, who was growing disillusioned with the war.

By the time the report was completed, a year had elapsed, McNamara was out of the Pentagon, and the gigantic work had only a few readers. No more than 15 copies were made, for high officials only. Now the New York Times has somehow got hold of 39 of the 40 volumes. It began printing large portions of the text and documents Sunday.

The 40 volumes go back to 1950, with the Truman Administration's first aid to the French in their Indochina war. The publication by the Times begins with portions dealing with 1964 and 1965, the period when American airmen, seamen and soldiers began openly to take part in the hostilities, in 1965 on a massive scale.

The documents show that President Johnson was considering bombing North Vietnam as early as March, 1964, and had started getting ready to do so (in-

cluding a warning to North Vietnam) that June, two months before the Tonkin Gulf incident and five months before the election.

Oddly, several touches that sound most like the Central Intelligence Agency were opposed by the C.I.A. — the domino theory that all Southeast Asia (and perhaps all South Asia and the Southwest Pacific islands) would fall to "Communist aggression" if South Vietnam did; the idea of secret commando raids into North Vietnam; the idea of bombing North Vietnam.

Other counsels prevailed, and the domino theory remained official doctrine and the commando raids and the bombing took place — with dismal results. Both were in time abandoned.

But President Nixon has resumed bombing North Vietnam ("reprisal reaction raids") on a considerable scale, and he still seems to believe in the domino theory, so the questions are still alive.

The report confirms and amplifies in hard detail the suspicions that have been growing in the public mind for a long time: that the American government deceived the American people by getting more and more deeply involved in a war which was never properly authorized, by a series of secret steps which went far beyond the public explanations.

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The McNamara Report

Three conclusions stand out in the massive -- 1.5 million words -- record of our involvement in Vietnam ordered in 1967 by then Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and now given the light of day by the New York Times and subsequently by other publications. They are:

1. The practice of "setting up" the opposition -- that is, provoking a situation to provide an excuse for action considered desirable -- is not unique among those nations we consider to be potential enemies. Our own government's track record in this regard is quite outstanding.

2. The "domino theory" -- that if South Vietnam fell to communism so would all Southeast Asia -- though the obsessive motivation of every Administration beginning with and including that of President Truman, was not shared by the Central Intelligence Agency.

In June, 1964, President Johnson asked the CIA: "Won't the rest of Southeast Asia necessarily fall if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control? The agency answered:

"With the possible exception of Cambodia it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore, a continuation of the spread of communism in the area would not be inexorable, and any spread which did occur would take time -- time in which the total situation might change in any number of ways unfavorable to the Communist cause."

3. The fateful clash between the U.S. destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy and North Vietnamese torpedo boats on Aug. 4, 1964, was a genuine attack by the North. But President Johnson, in submitting a report on it to Congress and asking for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, did not tell Congress that South Vietnamese amphibious forces under Gen. William C. Westmoreland's command had attacked North Vietnamese islands in the gulf July 30 and Aug. 3.

Thus if President Nixon is sticking with the domino theory as a basis for policy in Southeast Asia, remaining committed to preserving anti-Communist governments in Saigon and Laos, he has ample precedent from four Administrations -- three Democratic and one Republican. The policy seems destined to meet its acid test in next year's election when some, if not all, of the President's opponents will call for complete withdrawal from the area.

EDITORIALS

A Sorry Story Of Deception By The LBJ Administration

A TALE of deliberate deception unfolds in a new series of documents that details how President Johnson contrived to win justification for his Vietnam war policies.

It is not entirely new, but the substance of it is disturbing.

A secret government study of how the Vietnam war developed, revealed by The New York Times, lays bare a sorry story.

According to the study, the Johnson administration deliberately provoked the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in 1964. It then persuaded Congress that those incidents were sufficient cause to pass a resolution that amounted to a declaration of war.

Further, during the Presidential election campaign of 1964, while decrying Republican candidate Barry Goldwater's demands that North Vietnam be bombed, that administration itself was planning such bombings as soon as the election was over.

In both cases, anticipating opposition in Congress and from the public, the Johnson administration did not choose to argue its case in the usual constitutional manner. Instead, if these documents are correct, it said one thing while planning something different.

These actions, quite clearly, robbed U.S. citizens and their elected representatives of their voice in government. It amounted to government by decree.

As Sen. Stuart Symington (D., Mo.) said of the proper role these actions denied to congressional committees:

"What they're (the committees) doing is, they're operating in the blind, which means they're authorizing and appropriating billions of dollars of the taxpayers' money without in effect knowing what that money was going to be used for."

In the 1964 election, those voters who thought they were casting their ballot against the escalation of the war actually were voting exactly the opposite.

We can think of nothing more damaging to the democratic process.

Further, as these things were happening, the CIA was advising the President that the strength of the Viet Cong lay primarily in South Vietnam, making it at base a civil war. The CIA also challenged the "domino" theory in Southeast Asia.

All this, then, led the study to conclude that the Vietnam war was not being pursued for the sake of the Vietnamese, but to preserve and protect U.S. prestige and reputation in the world.

The revelations require more study for their many ramifications, and meanwhile they continue. We take no satisfaction in the fact that they confirm opinions that have been expressed here over the years. On the contrary, it is a sad thing for this country to learn that it has been the victim of so large and tragic an official deception.

The fact that in U.S. history there have been deceptions for the sake of power or politics before does not in any way alter the enormity of this one, for the Vietnam war has victimized this country as no other tragedy.